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As a young man, my mother's younger brother, Congressman Parren J. Mitchell – the first Afro-American elected to Congress in the State of Maryland – sat me down and said to me, “you might as well lie down and die if you stop fighting for what you believe in,” and I am not ready to die yet. I want to make one point very clear from the start: the comments made in this statement are coming directly from Jimmy Gittings, President of the Administrators' Union, and not from the Executive Board of the Union or anyone else. I emphasize this point because Dr. Alonso can be vindictive to those who speak out against him, and I do not want his wrath to fall on any shoulders other than my own.

The purpose of my statement is to attempt to open the eyes of the Board of School Commissioners and the elected officials who represent the citizens of Baltimore to some very serious problems with the way the School System, under Dr. Alonso's leadership, is investigating allegations of cheating and justifying disciplinary actions against certified employees. I feel it is my responsibility to bring these matters to the public's attention. As Dr. Alonso said in an interview with WBAL last year, “sunlight is a great disinfectant.”

On June 23, 2011, Dr. Alonso rushed to hold a press conference to announce to the public that adults at Abbottston Elementary School had cheated on the Maryland School Assessment test in 2009 by erasing and correcting students' answers in the test booklets. Dr. Alonso stated that his conclusion was based on a thorough, year-long investigation and data analysis performed by the Baltimore City Schools and the Maryland State Department of Education.

Shortly after making his announcement, Dr. Alonso brought charges against Ms. Marcy Isaac, the Assistant Principal of Abbottston, and Dr. Angela Faltz, the Principal of Abbottston, seeking to terminate their employment for misconduct, insubordination, and neglect of duty on the ground that adults at Abbottston had cheated on the 2009 MSA test. Ms. Isaacs is a 24-year veteran of the School System who, before her removal, had spent her entire career at Abbottston Elementary. Dr. Faltz is a 27-year veteran of the School System who served as the principal of Abbottston for 12 years, during which time she led the school out of State take-over status, and served as a coach and mentor to other principals in the City. Both administrators had unblemished records before Dr. Alonso accused them of cheating. Both were placed on unpaid status while they fought the charges against them.

Now, almost a year later, after two lengthy hearings, independent hearing examiners in the two cases have issued their recommendations that the charges brought by Dr. Alonso be dismissed and that Ms. Isaac and Dr. Faltz be reinstated to their former positions with full back pay. Both hearing examiners independently concluded that the so-called “erasure analysis” at the heart of Dr. Alonso's case against the two administrators was so deeply flawed that the opinions of its author were “incompetent.”

Both hearing examiners found it deeply troubling that the author of the erasure analysis, a psychometrician employed by the Maryland State Department of Education, concluded there was cheating before she even began her analysis, destroyed notes that may have contained

exculpatory information, used a method of erasure analysis that no one else in the country is using, and made no effort to determine whether factors, other than cheating, could have caused the drop in student test scores from 2009 to 2010. Both hearing examiners found the psychometrician's work to be so flawed that it could not be trusted. As one hearing examiner wrote: "Riddled with false assumptions, mathematical errors, bias, and flawed methodology, [the psychometrician's] crude erasure analysis simply does not withstand any test of scientific validity. . . . This is not science, it is not statistical analysis, and it is not an appropriate basis upon which a career ending decision can or should be made." The other hearing examiner wrote: "[The psychometrician's] opinions on tampering and on how the answers came to be erased on student test books in the 2008-2009 school year are based upon conjecture and not facts, and her opinions on these subjects should be excluded as incompetent."

Both hearing examiners found that there were compelling explanations for the drop in Abbottston students' test scores from 2009 to 2010 that had nothing to do with cheating. These factors included the following: (1) several seasoned teachers retired in 2009 and were replaced the following year with new, inexperienced teachers who had difficulty managing their classrooms; (2) the new teachers required multiple interventions and diverted time and attention from the leadership team that would ordinarily have been spent on targeted instruction for the students; (3) in the 2009-2010 school year, five of the six teachers in grades 3 through 5 were teaching grades that were new to them; (4) one of the fifth grade teachers was out on an extended medical leave; (5) the 2009-2010 school year was the first year that students from other neighborhoods were bused to Abbottston and the buses often arrived late and left early, disrupting the school schedule; (6) in the 2009-2010 school year, Abbottston was closed for 10 days as a result of two blizzards in December and February, causing the students to miss critical instruction in the days before the MSA; (7) because of the timing of the first blizzard, most of the teachers at Abbottston did not send home with the students the prep packages used to help the students continue to prepare for the MSA over the winter holidays; (8) the presence of monitors during the 2010 MSA testing made the students nervous; and (9) in the 2009-2010 school year, the teachers at Abbottston stopped teaching students a process-of-elimination test-taking strategy that had been taught in previous years.

Dr. Alonso, himself, in an interview with WBAL radio host Clarence Mitchell, IV in August 2011, acknowledged that "just because a school experiences huge drops [in MSA test scores] doesn't mean that the school has cheated." At that time, Dr. Alonso identified three factors, other than cheating, that could cause a huge drop in test scores, including (1) a small school population, (2) the mobility of students, and (3) the mobility of teachers. All three of those factors (among many others) were present at Abbottston in the 2009-2010 school year when the test scores dropped. In the 2009-2010 school year, Abbottston had a total of 237 students in grades pre-K through 5, and a total of 126 in the MSA testing grades (grades 3 through 5). Student mobility was also high – 35%. And that year, Abbottston lost three seasoned teachers and acquired two new, inexperienced ones.

Significantly, there was one class at Abbottston that was immune from many of the changes that affected the school in the 2009-2010 school year. One para-educator taught 4th grade in 2008-2009 and taught the same group of children 5th grade in 2009-2010. Only one child was new to her class in the 2009-2010 school year. The para-educator, unlike the other teachers, sent prep

packets home with her students before the snow storm in December. In short, her class did not suffer from the mobility of students, mobility of staff, poor teaching, classroom disruption, sick teacher, and absence of prep packets that afflicted the other classes at Abbottston that year. One hundred percent (100%) of her students scored proficient or above on the MSA tests in 2009, and 100% of her students scored proficient or above on the MSA tests in 2010.

All of this information was available to Dr. Alonso before he decided to press charges against Ms. Isaac and Dr. Faltz. The School System's chief investigator interviewed all 26 members of the Abbottston staff – everyone from custodian to principal. He asked the staff members whether they knew of any cheating at Abbottston. All 26 denied any knowledge of cheating. The chief investigator asked the staff members whether they were aware of any factors, other than cheating, that could have accounted for the drop in student test scores from 2009 to 2010. All 26 staff members offered one or more of the explanations set forth above. When the chief investigator was asked whether he had any reason to doubt that these 26 witnesses were telling the truth, he said “no.” Dr. Alonso chose to disregard the statements of the 26 witnesses, and the factors he knew could cause a drop in student test scores, in favor of an improbable theory of cheating.

It is unfortunate that Dr. Alonso rushed to judgment and humiliated dedicated employees before giving those employees an opportunity to confront the evidence and respond to the charges against them. It is unfortunate that, even after learning that the analysis of his central witness was invalid, Dr. Alonso refused to correct the injustice.

The two personnel matters now lie in the hands of the Board of School Commissioners who must decide whether to accept or reject the hearing examiners' recommendations.

In the meantime, Dr. Alonso continues to use the same flawed work to bring disciplinary charges against other teachers and administrators in the City. Because of the importance of these cases to the integrity of the School System and the dedicated veterans of the System whose careers are at stake, I have chosen to speak out before more lives and careers are destroyed.

Dr. Alonso talks about the integrity of the School System. What about the huge number of administrators who have left the System and taken their expertise with them? What about Dr. Faltz and Ms. Isaac, whom Dr. Alonso wrongfully removed from their positions and subjected to public ridicule on the basis of a bogus erasure analysis? The integrity of the School System requires that the System act with integrity.

I want to mention one final issue. In March 2012, I tried to bring this matter to the attention of the Board, and Dr. Alonso abruptly stopped me from speaking. My purpose was to give the Board a summary of the fundamental deficiencies in the investigations that had been conducted against two of our members. I was hoping that this would save other dedicated employees from being unjustly accused by Dr. Alonso and it would save the System from wasting time and money pursuing flawed cases. Dr. Alonso stopped me from speaking – as he has stopped others from speaking – because he does not want the Board members to hear facts which are not favorable to him and which do not support his agenda.

The fundamental principles of our nation are that people are innocent until proven guilty and that we must avoid the injustice of punishing the innocent. Such basic American principles are undermined by Dr. Alonso's actions in these cases, and his actions send a terrible message to our children. The Board should insist that Dr. Alonso act with integrity to ensure that similar injustices do not occur again in the future.

In closing, I want to thank Ms. Diane Woodard, President of the American Federation of School Administrators, and the entire National General Executive Board for their financial and moral support. AFSA and PSASA believe that cheating is wrong and that the guilty should be punished. But AFSA and PSASA also believe it is wrong to make accusations before conducting a full and fair investigation, and it is wrong, when the evidence on which the charges are based is shown to be unreliable, to continue to try to impose severe punishments on innocent people.